

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Sanford Bishop is giving both a thumbs up and a thumbs down on defense appropriations proposals now moving through Congress: up for making effective use of limited revenue to fund a new pay raise and many of the military's other priority readiness and quality of life needs, and down for slashing funding needed to improve substandard housing and other facilities.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, the Second District Congressman helped write the \$369.1 billion Defense Appropriations Bill and the \$9.2 billion Military Construction Appropriations Bill that were passed by the House. The two measures were expected to go to a joint conference committee to resolve any differences between the House and Senate versions.

The appropriations bills are scheduled to take effect on October 1, the start of the new fiscal year.

"Even though the economic slump has left Congress with less revenue, the defense appropriations bills currently under consideration represent a good start toward matching the substantial increases in military funding that have been enacted for each of the past five years," Representative Bishop said. "We've been in a rebuilding process to overcome severe deficiencies that developed during years of military downsizing that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the work we've done within the committee has continued this process."

The Congressman said the defense budget for the next fiscal year should be comparable to other recent defense budgets when the pending military appropriations bills are enacted and a supplemental military appropriations bill is considered later in the fiscal year. Along with other high priority needs, he said funding for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is expected to be included in the supplemental appropriations.

He said the Defense Appropriations Bill includes provisions to provide military personnel an average pay increase of 4.1 percent, the fourth straight pay raise above the annual statutory increase personnel receive. He said the measure also provides housing allowance funding to lower out-of-pocket expenses of personnel from 7.5 percent to 3.5 percent. Both of these provisions will help strengthen the quality of military service, he noted.

However, the Georgia lawmaker was sharply critical of House Republican majority leaders for rejecting an amendment to the Military Construction Appropriations Bill that would have prevented a deep cut in funding to rehabilitate and replace substandard military housing and other facilities.

Along with several others who serve on the Appropriation Committee's Military Construction Subcommittee, he backed a proposal to temporarily reduce the average tax cut earmarked for Americans who earn more than \$1 million from \$88,326 to \$83,326, and to use the \$1 billion this would provide to address acute deficiencies in military housing and other facilities. But the amendment was ruled out of order.

The bill, as passed in the House, reduces all military construction funding by \$1.5 billion and housing military funding by \$270 million. Although considerable progress has been made in

improving military housing over the past several years, more than 200,000 personnel and their families continue to live in barracks and family dwellings that are considered below standard, the Congressman said. Many of these housing units have deteriorated to the point where they considered unsafe and unhealthy, he added.

According to the Defense Department, he reported, 128,860 family units are needed, including 58,860 Army, 44,000 Air Force, 18,000 Navy, and 8,000 Marines; and 83,000 barracks are needed, including 34,400 Army, 17,700 Navy, 16,300 Marines, and 15,100 Air Force.

“I don’t think America’s millionaires would be terribly upset about receiving a tax cut of \$83,326 this year if they knew the \$5,000 they were giving up would provide decent living conditions for the men and women who defend the free system we all cherish,” Representative Bishop said.

“It’s easy to pass resolutions expressing appreciation to our troops, but deeds speak louder than words,” he added. “Appropriating less than last year for critical needs such as this is no way to show support for service members. We can, and must, do better.”